

October is the time of year when we welcome autumn's chill, along with a bushel full of fall flavors!



The air is crisp and the leaves are changing, heralding the autumn harvest. Roadside stands and farmers' markets are awash with the deep, rich hues of fall — pumpkin orange, cranberry, apple red, and the green and rose of two-toned pears. Even though you can enjoy apples all year, you'll find their flavor is best in the fall! Buy firm, well-colored apples with a fresh fragrance. The skins should be smooth and free of bruises and gouges. Store apples in a cool, dark place. They do well placed in a plastic bag and stored in the refrigerator. Choose apples by how you intend to use them – for eating raw or for cooking. All-purpose apples include Baldwin, Cortland, Fuji, Gala, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, McIntosh, Winesap, and my favorite York Imperial. For whole baked apples, choose Rome Beauty or Red Delicious. Apples are a great source of fiber and vitamins A and C! They're also rich in the powerful flavonoid quercetin, which acts as an antioxidant. Consider these recipes in the fall of the year when apples and nuts and hot cider are most appealing to the palate!

Spirited Apple Cider

12 whole cloves

6 whole allspice

3 (3-inch) cinnamon sticks, broken

1 tablespoon grated orange rind

2 quarts apple cider

1 cup orange juice

1 cup cranberry juice cocktail

1 cup pineapple juice

1/2 cup dark rum

1/2 cup apple-flavored brandy

Tie first 4 ingredients in a cheesecloth bag. Combine spice bag and cider in a large Dutch oven. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium, and cook 35 minutes or until mixture is reduced to 4 cups. Discard spice bag; stir in orange juice and remaining ingredients. Simmer over medium heat until heated. Serves 8.

Apple Country Pecan Salad

1 large green (Granny Smith) apple, cored and chopped

1 medium red apple (Red Delicious), cored and chopped

1/2 cup seedless red grapes, halved

1/4 cup diced cranberries

1 cup mandarin oranges, drained

2 cups chopped pecans, toasted

1/4 cup honey

1/2 teaspoon apple pie spice

Combine first 6 ingredients in a serving bowl. Mix the honey and apple pie spice in a small bowl and drizzle over apples and fruit. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Apple-Cheddar Cornbread

1 cup yellow cornmeal

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1/2 cup sugar

1 large egg, beaten

1 cup milk

1/4 cup butter, melted

2 small tart apples, chopped

1/2 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

Combine first 4 ingredients; make a well in center of mixture. Combine egg, milk, and butter; add to dry ingredients, stirring just until moistened. Stir in apple and cheese. Place a well-greased cast-iron skillet or 9-inch square pan in a 425 degree oven for 5 minutes or until hot. Remove from oven; pour batter into hot skillet. Bake at 425 degrees for 25 minutes or until golden. Serves 9.

Cider Pork Chops

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper

4 (1-inch-thick) bone-in pork chops

3 tablespoons butter, divided

4 Granny Smith apples, thinly sliced

1 cup raisins (optional)

1 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed

1 cup apple cider

Combine first 3 ingredients in a heavy-duty zip-top plastic bag; add pork chops. Seal and shake to coat. Remove chops and set aside. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a large skillet; add chops, and cook 5 minutes on each side or until browned. Grease a 13x9-inch baking dish with remaining 1 tablespoon butter. Place apples in dish; top with raisins, and sprinkle with brown sugar. Arrange pork chops over brown sugar, and drizzle with cider. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour or until pork chops are done. Serves 4.

Squash and Apple Casserole

1-1/4 pounds butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces

4 to 5 medium Granny Smith apples, peeled and cut into 8 wedges each

1/2 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/3 cup butter

Combine squash and apple in an ungreased 13x9-inch baking dish. Stir together brown sugar and next 4 ingredients in a small bowl. Cut in butter with a pastry blender until mixture is crumbly. Sprinkle sugar mixture over squash and apples. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees for 50 to 60 minutes or until squash and apple are tender. Serves 8.

Cranberries and Apples

3-1/2 cups fresh cranberries

3 large Granny Smith apples

1/4 cup oats

1-1/4 cups light brown sugar

1/3 cup all-purpose flour

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, melted

1 cup chopped pecans

Lightly grease a 9x13-inch baking dish. Spread cranberries in bottom of dish. Slice apples. Do not peel. Top cranberries with apple slices. In a small bowl, combine oats, brown sugar, and flour. Sprinkle over fruit. Toss pecans in melted butter. Sprinkle evenly over fruit and topping. Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 55 to 60 minutes. Serves 10 to 12.

Cabbage with Apples and Walnuts

6 bacon slices

1/2 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed

1/2 cup water

1/3 cup cider vinegar

1/2 medium cabbage, shredded

1/2 medium-size red cabbage, shredded

2 medium cooking apples, unpeeled, thinly sliced

1/3 cup chopped walnuts, toasted

Cook bacon in a large Dutch oven over medium heat until crisp; remove bacon, reserving 3 tablespoons drippings in pan. Crumble bacon, and set aside. Add sugar, water, and vinegar to drippings; cook over medium-high heat 3 to 4 minutes or until liquid is reduced to 3/4 cup. Add cabbage; cook stirring constantly, 4 minutes or until cabbage wilts. Add apple; toss gently. Remove from heat. Sprinkle with bacon and walnuts. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Caramel Apple Cake with Caramel Topping

2-1/2 cups sugar

3 eggs

1-1/2 cups vegetable oil

3 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons vanilla

1 cup chopped walnuts

2-1/2 cups diced apples (fresh or canned)

3 sticks butter

2 cups light brown sugar

1/4 cup milk

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream together sugar, eggs, and oil. Add flour; mix together until well blended. Add vanilla, nuts, and diced apples. Spread into a lightly greased and floured 9x13-inch baking dish; bake for 45 to 60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Heat butter, brown sugar, and milk in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil; stirring constantly. Let boil for about 2 minutes. Poke holes in the cake with a knife and pour the caramel topping over the warm cake. Serves 12 to 15.

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